
Visitor Development Strategy Meeting in Kalispell
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, Wed., 1/31/01, 3:00 to 5:00 pm

Attending:

- Meredith Haverfield, WestCoast Hotels
- Jane Bennett, Lakeside/Somers Chamber
- Susie Burch, Advisory Committee
- JeriMae Rowley, Flathead Valley C. C.
- Joe Unterreiner, Kalispell Chamber
- Bill Lundgren
- Lisa Lundgren, West Glacier Mercantile
- Sally Thompson, Glacier Raft Company
- Bill Dakin, Advisory Committee
- Gary D. Hall, Glacier Park, Inc.
- Jan M. Ek, Glacier Park, Inc.
- Bill Myers
- Randy Ogle, Advisory Committee Chair
- Don Jermuson, Glacier Waterton V.A.
- Carol Pike, Columbia Falls Chamber
- Linda J. Anderson, Glacier Country
- Andrea Goff, Bigfork Chamber
- Jim Trout, Whitefish Chamber
- Debbie Melby
- Julie Altemus, Senator Burns

Informal Remarks by Attendees

Staffing. More staff resources are needed to accomplish these ideas. We (volunteers) are tired. Do we have the energy to accomplish more?

Going-to-the-Sun Road Conferences. The WestCoast Hotel in Kalispell is hosting a conference for a division of the AASHTO (Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) because of the Going-to-the-Sun Road construction project.

IMAX. We want an IMAX theater.

Opportunity. We need to make a case to fund this mitigation program by saying “here is how we would use the money...” This is an opportunity to get infrastructure improvements that we would not have had otherwise.

Broadening Visitor Experiences. We need to “broaden the base” of things to do.

Public Transportation. This is key to everything.

Engineering Solutions. We still do not know the results of the engineering analysis. We do not know the engineering methods to be employed and the traffic management solutions to be proposed. It is hard to select a mitigation strategy before we know these technical recommendations.

Media Message. Broaden the base (of message delivery). Manage the media now, several years prior to road rehabilitation. We need a multi-year time period in which to deliver a message.

Conferences, trade shows, and some personal vacation plans are made years in advance. Some families save for years to come to Glacier National Park. We cannot disappoint them because we did not inform them soon enough.

We need a consistent message regardless of the messenger (National Park Service, Glacier Country, and local chambers, lodging operators, and public information officers). The same words should be used to deliver the same messages inside and outside of the park.

A press “question and answer” packet should be compiled for internal (local) use and for the national and international press. Printed press “packets” are outdated. Now the press needs a CD or they go on-line. The message needs to be delivered in that way.

Where is the Going-to-the-Sun Road web site? *(Most attendees did not know it exists.)*

The word “closed” should never be used. Even with shopkeepers, “closed” should not be used because that does not help people ... when will you reopen is what buyers want to know.

Mixed messages should be avoided. For example, there is a “no fishing” sign at the Fishing Bridge. It is irritating to the visitor.

Printed Literature Regarding Going-to-the-Sun Road. We need good printed material regarding Going-to-the-Sun Road. The material should be distributed within and outside of the park. To distribute material within the park, NPS approval is required. We need to agree on a common vocabulary and on whether to use the words “restore” or “rehabilitate.”

Grants for Infrastructure Improvements. There are probably grant moneys available but we need resources (people) to submit proposals for grant money. For example, EDA (Economic Development Administration) should have some grant money available.

Physical Improvements over Events. Let’s fund physical improvements, not events. Events are not sustainable.

New Roads. (a) We should build a new road from Akamina Parkway across the Continental Divide towards Uinta/North Fork Road ... over the historic pass. This will provide a loop through the park and relieve pressure on Going-to-the-Sun Road during rehabilitation.

(b) Camas Creek to Columbia Falls road (North Fork Road) should be paved. It is gravel now.

Types of Visitor Trips. FIT and fly/drives should be emphasized in marketing materials. While the number of tours is up in the local area, they are down nationally. We should work to create hub-and-spoke trips (a.k.a. loop trips and day trips.)

The number one travel desire is education, history and culture. We should build on these themes. We have a lot to offer.

Naturalists. NPS naturalists are very popular. Now that NPS receives money back from the entrance gate, they (the NPS) are more interested in funding this activity. We need more naturalist programs.

Partner Relations. The Waterton-Glacier International Peach Park Tourism Strategy is a three-year (2001 – 2003) program to promote the “year of the great bear.” Tourism development organizations from Jasper and Banff to Flathead County are involved. This is a great example of a partnership arrangement that jointly promotes tourism.

Visitation, Generally. The NPS does not want to be marketed.

Individual Ideas Provided on Rating Sheet

“These ideas are all great, but from the beginning, I think it has still been about the road. We have to continue to seek accurate and timely information about the road, its condition, whether MK is getting the type of information it needs, examining the role of the Federal Highway Administration, and inquiring about current maintenance programs and plans.”

“Emphasize history and culture of this road as a tour attraction.”

“Backbone – IMAX Theater. East & West Side Visitor Centers. Build as a destination; year around opening.”

“Please explore the radical idea of a new loop road, i.e., from Akamina Parkway across the Continental Divide towards Uinta/North Fork Road . . . Preliminary engineering was done many years ago. This would (a) create a true loop with Going-to-the-Sun Road in the middle; (b) allow Going-to-the-Sun Road reconstruction to impact less of loop tours; (c) create a new long-term draw to the park, and; (d) alleviate some of the long-term traffic on Going-to-the-Sun Road with a new option.”

“Add more NPS naturalists during time of construction. Expand the naturalist season; offer more activities. Re-groom old trails. Provide new opportunities for the public with NPS.”

“\$\$\$ Adding resources from the federal level during rehabilitation. Also, pursue grants. IMAX Theater is a very good idea. Press releases for continuity. Question & answer information for media so we can all be on the same page.”

“Concentrate on Glacier Park infrastructure, experience and service the most.”

“We need more money for the Park Service to implement these projects. These are all good marketing tools; however, we must begin now with broadening the base, visitor center, more park participation of personnel, roads, busses, etc.”

“Develop unified message and question-and-answer for press. Put on-line, with GNP approval.”

Visitor Development Strategy Meeting in Cut Bank

Glacier Gateway Inn, Thursday, 2/1/01, 10:00am to Noon

Attending:

- Macia Babowicz, Executive Director, Cut Bank Chamber of Commerce
- Laurie Elhard, Chamber President
- Joani Stewart, GAIN
- Dora Gustafson, Glacier Gateway Inn
- Linda Anderson, Glacier Country
- Gary Hall, Glacier Park, Inc.
- Don Jermunson, Waterton Glacier

Informal Remarks by Attendees

Lewis & Clark Rates. Cut Bank is less expensive than other locations in Montana. Perhaps we should advertise “Lewis & Clark” rates (meaning inexpensive rates). The Glacier Gateway Inn cultivates the seniors market because they are price sensitive.

Cut Bank History. The Museum is an outstanding asset that could become a stop on a loop tour.

Loop Travel. Loop trips that incorporate Cut Bank are of interest to the community. Cut Bank is currently working to partner with Amtrak. Loop tours that originate in Great Falls (during Lewis & Clark), or Whitefish or Bigfork, etc. are of interest to Cut Bank as long as they are a stop along the way.

Education Center. Cut Bank would like to become the education gateway to the area. Cut Bank would become the place to stop and get educated about where to go and how to spend your vacation. The Center might include an interactive screen that shows which places are busy and which are not.

The Chamber is erecting a teepee and will use it as an interpretive center.

Lewis & Clark. Cut Bank did not survive the list of projects to be funded by the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial because they did not think big enough. (We need to learn to

“think bigger.”) An interpretive center in Great Falls was funded but our less expensive ideas were not.

Cut Bank is considering loop tours that come to Cut Bank, but begin and end in Great Falls.

Cut Bank does sponsor a Lewis & Clark play.

Fight Site & Camp Disappointment. These are on private property. No one has pursued developing these sites for the Bicentennial. Steve Ambrose tells his audiences that Montana is the place to relive the Lewis & Clark expedition because you can still see their travel route. The vistas are the same as those experienced by Lewis & Clark, minus the telephone poles.

Fly-Ins. The local community hosts fly-in tours to the Cut Bank Airport from Denver several times during the summer months. (The tours originate in Denver.) The Cut Bank Airport has limited customs services (They can accommodate flights from Canada.).

Air Museum. Cut Bank wants to develop an air museum.

Firefighters & Smoke Jumpers. The story about the Blackfeet smoke jumpers could be told.

Downtown Revitalization. Downtown beautification and revitalization is an important goal for Cut Bank. They have invested heavily in their first mural (on the east/west highway) and are raising funds for the second mural (which will feature its oil and gas routes.)

Fam Trips. These should be conducted not only with members of the press and tour operators but also with meeting planners.

Glacier Park Activities. The vocabulary used to describe activities is important. Use of the word “walk” in lieu of “hike” may a better description of some of the easier trail trips.

Visitor Development, Generally. Cut Bank wants to slow visitors down -- and encourage them to have a meal or stay one night.

Visit Vocabulary. The words used to describe an activity are important because they send a message. For example, easy hikes within the park might be described using the word “walk” not “hike.” “Take a walk in the park.”

Individual Ideas Provided on Rating Sheets:

“Train loop tour; art auction. Don’t use “closed” signs anywhere in the park.”

Visitor Development Strategy Meeting in Browning
BIA Offices, Thursday, 2/1/01, 2:00 to 4:00 pm

Attending:

- Sam Rose, Choteau, retired legislator, Advisory Committee Candidate
- Wayne Bound, Planning Department, Blackfeet Tribe
- Ray Montoya, Enterprise Development Coordinator, Blackfeet Tribe
- Don White, Transportation Planner, Blackfeet Tribe
- Ron LaDeau, Browning Community College
- Linda Anderson, Glacier Country
- Gary Hall, Glacier Park, Inc.
- Jean Townsend, Coley/Forrest, Inc.

Informal Remarks by Attendees

Comparable Example. Evaluate the road closure in Glacier Park in Canada as a comparable.

Concessions & Lodging. The Blackfeet and Glacier Park, Inc. (GPI) might consider partnering when GPI’s concession contract comes up for renewal. The Blackfeet feel some competitiveness with Glacier Park, Inc. regarding lodging accommodations. The Blackfeet are improving their campground sites. Gary Hall (Glacier Park, Inc.) said to let him know about the sites and he will refer people. Linda Anderson (Glacier Country) said the same thing.

Emerging Type of Visitors. Consider fly-in vacations using the Starr School Airport. Consider fly-in outfitters.

Public Transportation. Public transportation is needed from the airport to visitor destinations. Alternatively, if guests cannot fly-in due to wind conditions, they will go to Cut Bank. They need public transportation from Cut Bank. A car rental agency is also needed.

Choteau has plans to extend its airport runway. David Letterman wants the improvements so he can fly his jet in.

Strategic Marketing Alliances. A partnership with Steven Ambrose might be considered. The Blackfeet are already considering a partnership with Burlington Northern.

Scenic Byways. The Blackfeet are pursuing a scenic byway designation ... and are pursuing a Native American byway designation that connects other Indian Reservations.

Lewis & Clark. The Blackfeet did not get along with Lewis & Clark very well but recognize the economic development opportunities associated with the bicentennial. This is an opportunity for the Blackfeet to tell their story --- "it changed our way of life forever." Discussion ensued regarding the Camp Disappointment site and private ownership of adjacent land. Property owners are developing a campground.

Cultural Center. The Blackfeet would like to build a cultural interpretive center that would be used to illustrate and celebrate their tribal heritage. There is concern that a national museum of Native American culture, to be developed in Washington D.C., will cause the artifacts Museum of the Plains Indians to be relocated and the Museum closed.

Guide Fisherman. Fly-fishing and lake fishing in the spring, summer and fall is good, as is ice fishing. Summit Station caters to fisherman; it now has its own chef. Discussion followed about training Blackfeet to be fishing guides. There is an informal guide training program at the community college. This idea could be expanded upon by catering to fisherman, selling them fishing equipment and food.

Tourism Training, Generally. The Community College wants to broaden its tourism training and tourism marketing efforts.

IMAX. This group has interest in pursuing an IMAX theater.

Local Artists. Native Americans are naturally artistic. Local artists will sell wonderful arts and crafts for \$10 or \$20 for gas money. There is no place to sell their products. A flea market, a retail store, and an art festival were discussed as ways to sell this art. Discussion also followed about tagging onto existing art festivals --- If the festivals are similar to existing festivals on the West side, then scheduling them the preceding or following week would keep the artists in Montana -- If the festivals feature different art, then scheduling them on the Thursday / Friday or Monday / Tuesday before or after other festivals is a way to capture the visitors. Mention was also made of a bronze foundry in Choteau.

Boating. Attracting sailboat, windsurfing, hydroplaning, or ice boating events or services are also a possibility. St Mary's Lake (which is outside of the park and on Reservation land) would work fine.

Power. The Blackfeet are negotiating to partner with a utility company to build a windmill farm. It was originally scheduled to be 24 megawatts but the partner now wants to build a 44-megawatt facility.

Missouri River. President Clinton designated the Missouri River as a national monument just before he stepped down. What is the significance of this? How can this be marketed?

Native American Celebrations. The Heart Butte Society Celebration is a pow-wow that is not on the Glacier Country list. It is a more traditional pow-wow than others. Discussion followed about holding weekly pow-wows or other celebrations during the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial to accommodate the influx of additional visitors.

Economic Development, Generally. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has a new philosophy of providing funds for projects and activities where Native Americans can show economic benefit. For example, if the on-going operations and maintenance of an amphitheater can be self-sustaining, then funds might become available for capital improvements. Funds might be in the form of a low-interest or cash flow loan rather than an outright grant.

Public Relations, Generally. The Blackfeet do not even have a public relations or marketing department. This is a field which they are learning. "Marketing is everything."

Business Venture Opportunities. The Blackfeet might host a workshop in Browning that features business development opportunities for individual entrepreneurs.

Glacier Park Improvements. Some say that the federal government owes us because they are going to restrict road improvements. But for the presence of Glacier National Park, these businesses would not exist.

Individual Ideas Provided on Rating Sheets:

“Spread visitor pressure and activities to the east side.”

“Would it be possible through Travel Montana to feed information to the Lewis & Clark Commission as to the Going-to-the-Sun Road access? If feel this would be a strong contact and tremendous source for dissemination of information.”

Visitor Development Strategy Meeting in Polson

Miracle of the America Museum, Friday, 2/1/01, 9:00-11:00 am

Attending:

- Tom Greenwood
- Todd Erickson, Bear Dance
- Tom McDonald, Conf. Salish & Kootenai
- Kimberly Maloney
- Rory Horning, Lakeshore Store
- Jeff Nobles
- Linda Anderson
- Kevin Engebretson, Port of Polson
- Bill Olson
- Michael Cripe
- Sandy Maki, Polson Chamber
- Carlisa London, Polson KOA

Informal Remarks from Attendees

Bed Tax. The Kwataqnuq Best Western manager expressed concern that the motel would not be marketed within this visitor development strategy since it does not pay bed taxes.

New Event Ideas. The National Black Powder Shooting Event and various Mountain Men events are new event ideas that could be marketed locally.

Western Art. The presence of four (to eight) foundries in the Flathead Valley provides a good opportunity to create a sculpture auction, show, or festival. Cody, Wyoming's success in its Western Art auction and the Western Design Conference could be pursued in the Flathead Valley.

Flathead Lake. While Flathead Lake is the chief local visitor attraction (in the Polson area), this asset is not promoted enough. Travel around Flathead Lake would be a great alternative tour that takes in many local communities. It is important to capitalize on the fact that water is currently a commodity that might appeal even more to areas where natural gas power prices are soaring.

Comparables. The road closure in Yellowstone might be a comparable example to evaluate. We might learn from how Cody managed the situation.

Road Reconstruction Timing. US 93 is going under construction soon. To minimize visitor inconvenience, care should be taken regarding the timing of Going-to-the-Sun Road improvements and US 93 improvements.

Signage. Signage to aid visitors needs important. The Community College was retained recently to design and construct signs in Polson; the results were very helpful.

International Travelers. As the visitor base broadens, it is important to have interpreters available. German was mentioned as a need.

Written remarks submitted for inclusion in the Meeting

"If other attractions, including museums, got even half the publicity of the 'major draw' entities, they could be come better draws and claim large numbers. Paid advertising is cost prohibitive for all volunteer non-profit museums. Much good could come from a major advertiser, including a one or two line mention of other attractions in the area."

"Living History Days at Miracle of the America Museum is now a two day event. Mention that it is always the weekend of the third Saturday in July and also mention State Old Time Fiddlers Contest in Polson the 4th weekend in July."

"Bureaucracies limit a lot of heritage experiences, i.e., FDA is against bread not baked in a modern kitchen, and fresh squeezed apple cider. Could exemptions be made for living history exhibits? How do they circumvent restrictions in Colonial Williamsburg?"

"Improve awareness and publicity of Glacier Country museums and their unique and diverse approaches to Montana history. Broaden visitor experience area by stressing 'museums' presently not even mentioned."

"Our National Parks (Glacier & Yellowstone) are like ears on a head – it's what's between them that counts."

"There's lots more to see in Glacier Country than Glacier Park."

"There's much more to enjoy in NW Montana than just Glacier Park. Don't you miss what Lewis & Clark missed?"

"If you think of Glacier Park as the heart of Glacier Country, and the main artery is clogged (Going-to-the-Sun), you need to keep the other blood vessels in even better shape."

"If there is concern about loss of visitation due to Going-to-the-Sun Road closures, all the more reason to support and advertise other attractions."

"Action #39: Improve awareness and publicity of Glacier Country museums and their unique and diverse approaches to Montana history.

"Description: Whether GNP is the destination or there is a related activity targeting a specific audience, tourists stay longer and spend more money if other attractions are also promoted. Also, when inclement weather alternatives are needed, museums can make the day enjoyable and keep the tourists in Glacier Country.

"Type: Cultural, historical and educational visitors services.

"Demographics: Empty nesters, families and anyone else who wants an enjoyable, nostalgic learning experience. Museums appeal to other interests besides scenery, golf and sports. Not everyone enjoys the same thing even within the same group.

"Expected Results: As publicity spreads, the draw would expand geographically. As places like the Miracle of the America Museum (MOAM) become a 'must-see' more visitors will have additional reasons to come to Montana and Glacier Country. Add all the reasons to come and it totals an increase in visitation. Increased publicity

for museums would also broaden visitor market and increase visitor experience and satisfaction by attracting those interested in cultural and heritage tourism.

"Examples: If Glacier Park International Airport hosted a fly-in, the aviation collection at the MOAM would be worth visiting. Participants would rent a car and make a loop tour. They could be directed down through Bigfork, see the museum, then back through Polson, up the west short through Lakeside and finally downtown Kalispell. These same pilots and their companions might otherwise spend their whole time lounging around the airport."

"Skiers and snowmobilers might be interested in the extensive winter sport and rare snowmobile collection at the Miracle of America Museum. They may be please to know there is a large museum in the area that is open in the winter, which has this type of collection, displayed. A similar traffic flow would result in more dollars being left in the valley."

"Rodeos and horse shows should promote the cowboy displays at the MOAM, Calamity Jane's saddle at the Polson Downtown museum and the western displays at the Nine Pipes Museum."

Individual Ideas Provided on Rating Sheets

"Without a doubt!! Follow old NPS advice with Mission 66 and offer another major loop via the Akamina Pky through Waterton and connect with the North Fork Road. This will be a seasonal road. However, it will provide an excellent northern loop using Swiss road engineers to construct a road over or tunnel through the Divide. I have walked all of these options and they are all very doable with good Swiss engineering. Also, this project would be a great gift from our friends to the North to celebrate the 100th year of Glacier National Park -- 2010. See attached map (not provided)."

"Northwest Design Conference."